

- **SFY 2006**

“The Need for Public Guardians in The Commonwealth of Virginia,” Karen A. Roberto et al., Virginia Tech Center for Gerontology, May 2007. This status report was requested by the 2005 General Assembly session of the Virginia Department for the Aging. It calls for a statewide needs assessment to estimate the: (1) current unmet need for Public Guardians/Conservators in Virginia, and (2) the projected unmet need for Public Guardians/Conservators in Virginia for Fiscal Years 2010, 2015, and 2025. Based on U.S. Census population estimates and projections and on data on unmet need from a survey of 114 agency representatives – including 100 percent of the current 15 public guardian programs – there is an estimated need for 1,441 additional Public Guardians currently (i.e., in 2007). By 2010, the unmet need is expected to increase to 1,707, and by 2030 the estimated unmet need will be 2,170. These numbers are conservative and represent only those impoverished persons in desperate need of state-funded guardianship services. The primary agencies surveyed to establish estimates of current and future need for guardianship included all 15 Public Guardianship and Conservator Programs, Community Services Boards directors, Adult Protective Services (APS) supervisors, and directors of social services for state hospitals and training centers.

“Foster Youth Emancipation: Implications of Resiliency, Independence and Responsibility,” Deborah A. Harris-Sims, doctoral dissertation, Capella University, an on-line university based in Minneapolis, MN, June 2006. This study incorporated descriptive and correlational research methods to explore possible relationships between independence-responsibility and resiliency. The researcher administered the Resiliency Scales for Adolescents (RSA) to $N = 60$ foster-care youth. In addition, the Responsibility and Independence Scales for Adolescents (RISA) was administered to each foster youth’s caseworker or agency-appointed designee ($N = 30-40$), responsible for managing the life of the youth. Results indicated a null relationship between the cumulative constructs of resiliency and independence-responsibility. However, with respect to sub-scales, the study found that for youth in foster care, higher levels of emotional reactivity were associated with lower levels of responsibility. Further, when compared with their non-foster-care peers, youth in foster care scored significantly lower in their sense of relatedness, responsibility, and emotional reactivity.

“Exploratory Analysis of Former Foster Care Youth – How are They Doing?”, Debbie I. Kirkwood, doctoral dissertation, Capella University, August 2006. There are significant indications that the foster care system is not adequately preparing youth for transitioning into adulthood. Six (6) former foster-care youth between the ages of 18 and 21, who had participated in Independent Living Programs (ILPs) in the Hampton Roads, VA area prior to their discharge from foster care, were surveyed to assess their status regarding self-sufficiency. Data collection consisted of a mixed-methods approach using archival records, a mail survey, and review of the youths’ Life Skills Assessment scores. The youths’ opinions about the services received during participation in ILP training were assessed using two open-ended questions. Content analysis was used to suggest common themes and trends in survey responses and archival records. Recurring themes from the survey responses signified discrepancies between the topics presented in ILP training and

what was actually internalized by these former foster-care youth. Further, the study indicated that outcomes are significantly improved if these youth are employed and have completed high school prior to leaving foster care.

“Conceptualizing Hoarding Behavior Among Elderly Women: A Mixed-Methods Approach,” Susan J. Murdock, doctoral dissertation, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, November 2006. Hoarding in the community involves substantial cluttering and impaired functioning, often exposing the hoarder to extensive health and safety risks. Based on the social theory of Functionalism, this research explores the three elements of hoarding—relentless acquisition, intense possessiveness of objects, and a reluctance to discard possessions—as a sociocultural phenomenon. The mixed-methods methodology entailed a quantitative study completed by 134 Adult Protective Services (APS) workers throughout Virginia and a qualitative study of 5 randomly-selected APS workers who volunteered for in-depth interviews.

Findings revealed that APS workers come into contact with severe cases of hoarding, over two-thirds of the cases citing extremely hazardous, unsafe, and cluttered living conditions. Similar to other research studies, hoarding in this study was most prevalent among elderly women, with the most common objects hoarded including printed materials such as newspapers, magazines, and junk mail. Factor analyses resulted in three factors with high loadings and correlations, particularly the factor that associates hoarding with a relentless need or desire to acquire more possessions. Content analyses of the qualitative data found that workers recognized several ways in which hoarding was functional, including emotional attachment to possessions, reducing stress, and providing meaning and identity. The mixed-methods approach demonstrated that Adult Protective Services workers tend to ascribe mental illness explanations to many hoarding cases, often equating hoarding to an addiction, while other published research finds only a nebulous connection between mental illness and hoarding behavior.